

# Fruit – Avoiding Crop Failure

Selected Scripture

## Introduction

Every year we watch the weather along with the citrus crop growers. When there is unexpectedly bad weather, there are stories of tremendous loss – citrus crops that are ruined. We are obviously concerned for what is happening to these growers and their crops.

I am concerned about another fruit crop failure, as well. It is one that we often overlook. It is the crop of fruit that Jesus Christ intends for us to bear in our lives. I hope our discussion today, will be, not only encouraging, but challenging, as we study the word “fruit” through the New Testament. I believe the words of scripture are inspired and are loaded with meaning. We will look at this word today, and develop principles from it.

## A Call for Vineyard Workers

We will begin by looking in our Bibles at Romans chapter 7, which will lay down a challenge for us. This text lets us in on the simple fact that fruit bearing is not an option as far as God is concerned. It is going to be part and parcel of every believer’s life. In fact, we are told this very clearly, in Romans 7:4,

***Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.***

Now I used to think, until I got involved in the study of the word “karpos,” which is translated “fruit,” that fruit meant someone you led to Christ, or that fruit referred to a characteristic developed in your life by the Holy Spirit, like love, joy, and peace. However, what literally exploded into my study was the fact that fruit is used in a plethora of ways, ways that touch every area of our lives. I have tried to categorize these ways to help us make sense of them and understand them better.

## Fruits From the Vineyard of Life

Let me give three categories of ways in which “fruit” is used; these are fruits from the vineyard of life.

1. The first category is the fruit of evangelism.

This is the fruit that we are pretty familiar with. This is the one that we are probably the most aware of, when we think of fruit.

Turn to John chapter 4. Jesus Christ has shared Himself with the woman at the well – Jacob’s well – and revealed to her things that she thought only she knew. But He, being the great Physician and the Master of the universe, and in fact, the creative designer of her, knew everything about her. When He revealed these things to her, she became so convicted that He was who He said He was, that she headed back to the city and shared the news of this Man with everyone in Samaria.

At this time, Jesus’ disciples come along. They say to Him, in John 4:31b,

*. . . Rabbi, eat.*

Jesus will respond to the disciples with these words, in John 4:34-35a,

*. . . My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, “There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest? . . .”*

In other words, the seed has been planted and there are still four months to go. Continue to John 4:35b.

*“. . . Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.”*

I have heard some of the most interesting speculations on the meaning of Jesus’ words,

*. . . the fields, . . . are white for harvest.*

There was no harvest to be made yet. In four months, the people would reap the corn in Samaria, which is the crop they grew.

Dr. Morton, an expositor of yesteryear, was sitting at Jacob’s well. While sitting, he noticed a group of men coming from the city. They began to ascend the hill toward him, just as they had done when Jesus was sitting at this well. The men were dressed in the common apparel of that day, which would be the white and the off-white flowing robes, as well as turbans on the heads of many. Seeing these men, Dr.

Morton made an interesting suggestion. As Jesus sat there with His disciples around Him, in sight of corn yet to be harvested, seeing these bands of men following this woman, with flowing white robes, could it have been that He said, "Look, coming through the field – they are now white for harvest."?

Jesus Christ was obviously referring to men and women, not corn. Perhaps this was His meaning. We do not know.

Jesus' words in the next verse are fascinating and ones that often cause confusion. Look at John 4:36. Note two words in this verse – "reaps" and "sows".

***Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.***

It is fascinating in this text that in the mind of Jesus Christ, the fruit of eternal life; that is, sharing Him and reaping souls, has two aspects that are equally rewardable.

One aspect is the literal reaping, or as we refer to it, the winning of souls. The words "winning of souls" is never used in the New Testament, but it is the point in time when we share the gospel with someone. We say, "Would you like to trust Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?" And they say, "Yes."

The second aspect is sowing. Jesus says,

***. . . he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.***

So when we desire to bear spiritual fruit; specifically, the fruit of evangelism, let us be careful that we do not just think of winning others, but also consider the whole ministry of sowing.

I think soul winning has been taken, to a great degree, way out of proportion as to the way God perceives it. There are people running around with little notches on their belts, thinking they are involved in the ministry because they had someone pray. That is what we pursue, but there are people in our work place and our neighborhood, people who show up on our doorstep or change our tires, people we bump into that we are involved in evangelism with if we just sow the word; if we just say something about Jesus Christ. We can rejoice just as much as the one who finally draws the net and has them invite Christ into their life.

The fruit of evangelism is one category of fruit. I think that understanding this, men and women, will

change the way we view people. We do not just view them as a quick decision, we view them as disciples to be made. We are in the process, along with many other believers that God brings into their lives, of a ministry that will ultimately bear fruit – the fruit of evangelism.

2. The second category, which is a little more extensive, is the fruit of righteous living.

How do we recognize this fruit in our own lives? If we are bearing the fruit of righteous living, in the way these words are used in several passages, how do we detect it; how do we recognize it? I want to give three characteristics whereby we can recognize whether or not we have this fruit in our lives.

- The first characteristic of this fruit is discernment.

One of the characteristics of knowing we are bearing the fruit of righteous living; that is, that the Holy Spirit is actively involved in our lives, is that we will have discernment. Look at Philippians 1:9-11, but let me change the structure of these verses so that we read it as cause and effect, as it literally is in the original. We will start with verse 11 and then move to 9 and 10.

***having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.***

Now look at Philippians 1:9.

***And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,***

Underline that word "discernment". Continue to verse 10.

***so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;***

This could be read, as Paul is praying, like this:

***. . . that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,***

Why?

***so that you may [be able to] approve [discriminate] the things that are excellent, .***

..

Why?

**. . . in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;**

So, if the Spirit of God is involved in my life and I am bearing fruit, one of the characteristics is that I am going to be discriminating; I am going to be discerning; I am going to be able to detect the things that are the truth and the things that are in error.

Now I believe, and I think you would agree, that we live in the most non-discriminating age of our American culture – anything is believable.

One interesting word in these verses, is the word “sincere”. This word really sheds light, or at least it has in my own study. It can be broken into two Latin words “sine cerus,” from which we get our word “sincere”.

Now in Jesus Christ’s day, the largest industry was pottery. There were two kinds of pottery.

One kind was the cheap pottery, which was thick. When it was fired, it was usually durable and would not crack in the oven. It, of course, was used for everything imaginable in that day.

There was also the fine pottery, which was very thin. During the firing, it could crack, which would cause small fissures appear. As a result, dishonest tradesmen had a pearly hard wax that they would rub into the cracks of this pottery. Now fine pottery was thin and light before it was either glazed or painted and these fissures could not be detected unless the pottery was held up to the sun.

So the people developed, what they called in that day, “sun testing”. A frugal purchaser would come to the market and pick up the fine pottery and, if it was not cloudy, would hold it up to the sun to see if it had a fissure, a crack, or something wrong with it.

I think this is the idea in these verses in Philippians. In other words, as the Spirit grows fruit in our lives, we hear things, we see things, we experience things, we hear of experiences, and we evaluate; we hold them up to the light of the Son; that is, the words of Jesus Christ. This discernment is one of the characteristics of knowing that Jesus Christ is bearing fruit in our lives – the fruit of righteousness.

I love the example of the Berean people. You may remember that Paul and Silas come into town and hold an evangelistic service; in fact, they hold a series of services. The people of Berea come to listen to their preaching. We could pull some of these Bereans

aside and say, “Hey, I understand the greatest evangelist of all time is here in Berea preaching. Isn’t he wonderful?”

“Well, we don’t know yet.”

“What do you mean, you don’t know yet?”

As we are told in Acts 17:11, the Bereans would go and hear Paul and Silas, and then, they would be,

**. . . examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.**

They are not listening to “fly-by-night” people, they are listening to the apostle Paul and to Silas. Yet, they had a discriminating attitude; they had discretion.

I think our minds need to develop this type of characteristic, in which we hear and then, test it by the Son; by the Scriptures. We need to take what we hear to the Bible and evaluate it. We need this characteristic now more than ever.

- The second characteristic of this fruit of righteous living is distinction.

Turn to Ephesians 5:7-13. Let us begin with verses 7 through 9.

***Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; so walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),***

The words in verse 9 are a combination of “karpos” and “righteousness”. Continue to Ephesians 5:10-13.

***trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.***

Several things stand out in these verses. There is the reference to the light. We are light because Christ is within us; we are children of light.

Paul also encourages me in verse 10. Did you catch what he said? He said, “I am,”

***trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.***

The word “trying,” refers to careful examination. The apostle Paul, who could have said, “I’ve cornered the truth; I’ve got it down; I’ve discovered what

pleases the Lord,” instead says, “I’m trying, by careful examination, to figure out what pleases God. And in the process of learning, I am, like light, walking into dark places and exposing the darkness.”

We are like little light bulbs exposing the darkness. There is a distinction; there is a difference in our lives and it is observable by others because we are light – Christ is in us.

- The third characteristic of the fruit of righteousness is, interestingly enough, discipline.

Look at Hebrews 12:7-9a.

***It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all [believers] have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them . . .***

Did we ever have earthly fathers to discipline us!

It is interesting, and underline the thought, that parents do not lose respect by disciplining, parents lose respect by *not* disciplining. Continue to Hebrews 12:9b-10a.

***. . . shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, . . .***

I am going to have my sons memorize this verse when they get older because they are already negotiating the number of whacks. However, it is as it seemed best to me.

You might be saying, “You’re admitting you whack them.”

You might think that is wrong. Well, you do not live with them – I do!

Continue to Hebrews 12:10b-11 and note the last phrase in verse 11.

***. . . but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.***

What is one of the symptoms that I am bearing the fruit of righteousness in my life? God is disciplining me. We are His sons or daughters and when we get

out of line and need to be corrected to prevent error, He disciplines; He straightens the path.

Am I bearing the fruit of righteousness? Ask yourself:

- Am I discerning? How narrow is the funnel of my mind? What grid does something have to go through before I believe it is true, since I am hearing all kinds of things?
  - Is there distinction? Do I expose darkness, which is going to cause some trouble?
  - Am I experiencing discipline?
3. The third category is the fruit of sacrifice.

Turn to Hebrews chapter 13. This is a passage in which the word “karpos” or “fruit” occurs. You may want to study this on your own. I, in fact, did not even touch the hem of the garment of the many times fruit is mentioned.

The fruit of sacrifice is evidenced by at least three things.

- First, by lips that praise God’s character.

Look at Hebrews 13:15.

***Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.***

There is, I think, a reason that this was so powerful to the reader. You may remember that Hebrews was written to the former Jew who had been pulled out of Judaism. Throughout the book of Hebrews, what is he telling them? He is telling them that there is no longer a necessary sacrifice – Jesus Christ is sufficient. Throughout this entire book, he says, “*Do not* sacrifice anymore,” because their friends were still doing so. When these Jews came to the end of Hebrews, they might have asked the question, “Well, is there anything that I sacrifice?”

He uses this arena to say, “Yes, there is. There is a sacrifice that you can give God.”

What is the sacrifice? The “sacrifice of praise”.

He says, in this passage, that it is a continual sacrifice. In fact, the rabbis taught them, and we have their writings, that the most purely motivated offering of the Old Testament economy, was the thank offering. The rabbis would write, “With any other offering that you bring to God, you are seeking forgiveness; you are seeking fruit (harvest); you are seeking this and wanting that.”

However, whenever they came to Yahweh with the thank offering, they had no motive other than thanking Him for who He was. So in Hebrews, the Jews were told, “Yes, we can sacrifice something to God – a purely motivated offering of praise.”

- Secondly, the fruit of sacrifice is evidenced by finances that acknowledge God’s control.

Look at Philippians 4:14-15. Paul is thanking the church at Philippi for their giving.

*Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone;*

This is interesting. Paul was probably the founder of several churches, yet none of them thought it necessary to help, except this one in Philippi. He thanks them.

Continue to Philippians 4:16.

*for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.*

Now, in Philippians 4:17, Paul starts to cover his tracks.

*Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit [“karpos” or fruit] which increases to your account.*

When we think of fruit, we think of the characteristic of the Holy Spirit, and we perhaps, think of the fruit of evangelism, but do we think of finances? Do we realize the fact that when we invest our money in helping other people, we are, in a sense, bearing fruit? This is the what Paul is saying in these verses.

- Thirdly, by a life that advances God’s cause.

Look at John 12:24-26.

*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.*

In these verses, Jesus refers to us as a seed. He says, “You will not bear fruit unless you die. You

will not bear fruit for My cause unless you give up your life and are planted in the soil like a seed.”

It is in the death of the seed that life comes forth. In the same way, it is in the sacrificing of our lives in the cause of Jesus Christ that we bear fruit.

So how do we bear fruit? By sacrificing our lives, by investing our finances, by praising God with our lips.

## A Challenge to Potential “Fruit Bearers”

Now let me give two challenges, at this point.

1. First, there is the challenge from Paul in Titus 3:14, which gives the principle that fruit develops in soil enriched with good deeds.

As we read Titus 3:14, plan to underline a phrase. This is an interesting challenge from Paul.

*Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.*

The words “good deeds” appear several times in this epistle. The references include:

- Titus 3:8,  
*This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. . . .*
- Titus 3:1,  
*Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed,*
- Titus 2:14b,  
*. . . a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*
- Titus 2:7a,  
*in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds. . . .*

We have the idea, because we hold to the tenet that salvation is by grace alone, apart from works, that we are to quit doing the good works, as if they are not important. However, the good deeds that Paul refers to in these verses, are good deeds shown to other people; good deeds shown in the world system; good deeds given toward those we live next to and those we work with. Paul says, “Don’t forget the

good deeds; the good works,” and his repetition makes it very clear.

The principle, I think, from this is that fruit develops in soil that is enriched with good deeds. So good deeds; good works; works that honor God are fertilizer to the soil that produces fruit.

2. Secondly, there is the challenge from Peter in II Peter 1:8, which gives the principle that fruit develops in soil enriched with godly character.

Let us begin with II Peter 1:4-5a.

*For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith . . .*

We already have saving faith, which was a gift from God, but he is saying to add several things, in II Peter 5b-7.

*. . . moral excellence, . . . knowledge, . . . self-control, . . . perseverance, . . . godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.*

Now in II Peter 5:8, underline the word “if” because this is the challenge.

*For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful . . .*

The point is that although we have faith, we must yield to the Holy Spirit to develop all of these other qualities in us. Peter says, “If you are pursuing all of these, you can be confident that you will not be unfruitful.”

This is quite a challenge. I do not believe the Lord is going to come along and drop a big basket of “fruit” if we stand idly by without pursuits of His holiness and His character. It is possible, as a believer, to be unfruitful, so this is the challenge.

## **Application – Truths Learned in the Vineyard**

Let me tie up our study today with three additional thoughts. Let us turn to John chapter 15 to get a perspective on the process. We have looked at the products, so let us look at the process. Listen carefully to these three truths.

1. First, fruit bearing is not the reward of self-effort.

I know fruit bearing sounds like a reward of self-effort, since we really have to engineer our flesh, but it is not. Look, in fact, at what Jesus emphasizes in John:15:4-5,

*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*

The fascinating thought of this is knowing that if we, as vines, are grafted into the stump or branch and into the root or system that produces the life, then fruit comes because of our submission to Him. But, if we step back from it and take a look, we do not get any credit. Fruit comes from what *Jesus* has done *in* us; what *Jesus* has done *through* us. All we have done is say, “Lord, I will pursue what You want me to pursue. I want to be what You want me to be. I want to develop the qualities in my life that You want me to have.”

However, do not ever get to the point where we think, “It’s all up to Stephen Davey, or John Doe.” – it is not.

2. Secondly, fruit bearing is not a reason for self-glorification.

Look at John 15:8-11.

*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

We do get something out of this, we get joy, *but* God gets the glory. Remember there is a distinction – He receives *all* the glory for anything that is done in our lives, but we receive a barrel full of joy in knowing we are submitted to Him and being used by Him. We can never take the credit; we can never take the glory; we can never glorify in ourselves, however.

Someone wrote, “A peach tree never counts its peaches, it just bears them.”

Someone else said, “If we could sew one stitch into our eternal garments, so to speak, we would spend *all* of eternity admiring that one stitch.”

There is no room, in the process of bearing fruit, for self-glorification. God receives the glory, we receive the joy. He receives joy, as well.

3. Thirdly, fruit bearing is not the result of self-imposed plans.

Look at John 15:16. I like this powerful verse. Note that fruit bearing, according to this verse, is not an option.

***You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.***

He has chosen us, He has appointed us, and He has equipped us. And do not get the idea that fruit bearing is our grand design. This is not something that *we* came up with, this is something that *He* came up with. Bearing this kind of fruit is *His* design; *His* plan. So He works in our lives, as we submit to Him, to produce in us the fruit.

Notice again the last phrase in John 15:16. I will briefly discuss this because it is taken out of context so often. It says,

***whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.***

This is not talking about asking the Father for a Buick that you would like to have. This phrase is not talking about any wish or desire that you may have.

Jesus is talking, in this context, about spiritual fruit. He is saying, “If you pursue Me; if you want these fruits; if you will develop, by My strength, the qualities of character that enrich the soil from which fruit comes; if you have the passion in your heart that leads you to ask and seek that God gives you fruit, then, “I’ll give it to you.”

It is obvious, because you are joining this discussion today, that you want this year to be fruitful in your life. There are many different kinds of fruits. You may want to review our discussion today and look up the words in your concordance.

If we want to be fruitful, then how will it happen? It will happen when we set aside self and realize that the strength and the sufficiency is Jesus Christ. It will happen when we do bear fruit and do not take the glory and pat ourselves on the back and say, “Do you

know what I did for Jesus Christ?” It will also happen when we recognize that we need to be aligned with His design; with His plan.

Fruit bearing is *His* master plan. He has, by His grace, designed that we fit into it and ultimately, that we bear fruit for His glory.